

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

WHY FIGHT ON? THE GERMAN DECISION TO CLOSE THE KURSK SALIENT

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## ABSTRACT

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The Battle of Kursk in July of 1943 was a pivotal battle in the Russian-German conflict, 1941-1945. After the German attack failed, the Russians responded with a major offensive and gained the strategic initiative. From then on, the German army was only capable of a series of defensive stopping actions in failed attempts to thwart the advancing Red Army. The inevitable outcome was the fall of Berlin in May of 1945. There were a number of options Hitler and the German high command could have chosen in lieu of attack. The decision to choose offensive action becomes even more interesting upon examination of Germany's strategic situation. Tunisia, the last vestige of the German occupation of North Africa, was lost and Allied offensive action on the European continent was a real and imminent threat. There were also attrition issues, production problems, and differences of opinion between Hitler and key German generals. Finally, the northern and southern shoulders of the Kursk salient, the chosen points of attack, were heavily defended. What compelled Hitler and the German High Command to take such a gamble? What were the strategic issues that guided this decision? Was the outcome decisive? And finally, what other actions might have altered the outcome of the conflict?



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## WHY FIGHT ON? THE DECISION TO CLOSE THE KURSK SALIENT

Guderian: "Why do you want to attack in the east at all this year?"

Keitel: "We must attack for political reasons."

Guderian: "How many people do you think even know where Kursk is? It's a matter of profound indifference to the world whether we hold Kursk or not. I repeat my question, why do you want to attack in the east at all this year?"

Hitler: "You're quite right, whenever I think of this attack my stomach turns over."

Guderian: "In that case your reaction to this problem is the correct one, leave it alone!"

—Heinz Guderian<sup>1</sup>  
10 May 1943

There is much speculation about whether the battle of Kursk was decisive. Such discussions focus on comparative attrition and replacement rates, growing Soviet competence on the field of battle, the over extension of German forces, etc. One thing, however, is certain: after the *Wehrmacht's* defeat at Kursk, Germany began a downward slide from which it never recovered, ending with the fall of Berlin in May of 1945. In studying this conflict as all such monumental conflicts, there is an irresistible urge to ask — "what if?" What were the strategic factors that forced the battle? What other options were available to the German High Command? And finally, if such options were taken, would the balance of history have been altered significantly?

### THE EASTERN FRONT: JUNE 1941 - MARCH 1943

At the launching of 'Barbarossa' on June 22<sup>nd</sup> of 1941, the *Wehrmacht* enjoyed unprecedented success. They managed to encircle and destroy numerous Soviet armies: the Minsk encirclement of 1 July, 1941, in which the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Soviet Armies were surrounded resulting in 341,073 soldiers killed captured or missing<sup>2</sup>, the Smolensk encirclement of 27 July, 1941, in which the 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and 20<sup>th</sup> Armies were surrounded<sup>3</sup>, the Uman' encirclement of 21 July, 1941, in which the 6<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Armies were surrounded resulting in 107,000 captured<sup>4</sup>, the Kiev encirclement of 21-23 September, 1941, in which the 5<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup> and 37<sup>th</sup> Armies were surrounded resulting in 452,700 encircled contributing to a total loss of 616,304 Russians killed, captured or missing in the Battle for Kiev.<sup>5,6</sup> By the end of September



of 1941, it is estimated that the *Wehrmacht* had captured or killed nearly two and a half million Russian soldiers and destroyed massive amounts of equipment: 22,000 guns, 18,000 tanks, and 14,000 aircraft.<sup>7</sup>

Additional catastrophes for the Red Army continued: the Vyazma and Bryansk encirclements in mid October of 1941 resulted in 688,000 captured with a likely total of one million Russians lost and the destruction of seven armies<sup>8</sup> inflicting an additional two million dead or captured by the end of December.<sup>9</sup> When the German 1941 offensive ended on the 5<sup>th</sup> of December, German armor and men were within 20 kilometers of Moscow.<sup>10</sup> German officers could see traffic in the streets of the city through their field glasses.<sup>11</sup> Indeed many believed that the Red Army was on the verge of collapse. This was truly the high water mark for the German Army on the Eastern Front. But what came next was a foreshadowing of things to come.

The fact that the Russians were nearly vanquished at the end of 1941 seemed lost on the Russians themselves. "The Germans were struck by the tenacity of the Red Army. The uneasy feeling that they were fighting something of almost supernatural strength was widespread among the German soldiers, particularly the infantry, and can be traced in their letters and diaries----alternating with periods of triumph and exultation".<sup>12</sup> It was this incredible resilience of the Russian soldier, this "never say die" attitude that would haunt their German invaders throughout the campaign. So on 5 December 1941, the Red Army responded with a counteroffensive that took the *Wehrmacht* by surprise. In fact if Stalin had not been so ambitious and had ordered more limited and focused attacks, he may have very well succeeded in destroying major German formations. But, by biting off more than his forces could chew, Stalin failed to eliminate the encircled German forces in front of Moscow and made only limited gains elsewhere.<sup>13</sup>

Germany's summer offensive of 1942 marked a shift in strategic objectives from Moscow to the oil rich regions of the Caucasus and thus, German forces focused their attacks in the south with a secondary objective of capturing Leningrad in the north.<sup>14</sup> Hitler's new focus was, among other things, designed to prevent Lend-Lease equipment and supplies from the U.S. and England from getting into Russia through the northern and southern routes<sup>15</sup> as well as "taking possession of the Caucasus with its oil resources".<sup>16</sup> Hitler reorganized the southern area into two army groups: Group A and Group B, each with its own objectives. Army Group A would work in the extreme south to secure the oil rich regions of the Caucasus and Army Group B would operate to the north of group A to secure a strong northern flank and with the help of Army Group A from the south, encircle Soviet forces in the region of Stalingrad. "Once this

encirclement was achieved, Army Group A would continue its exploitation to the southern oil region".<sup>17</sup>

So more catastrophes were in store for the Red Army as the *Wehrmacht* launched Operation Blau (Blue) on 28 June 1942.<sup>18</sup> the Khar'kov encirclement of 22 May 1942 in which the 6<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 57<sup>th</sup> Armies and Army Group Bobkin were surrounded and the Crimea disaster of 8-19 May 1942 where Field Marshal Erich von Manstein's 11<sup>th</sup> Army smashed the 44<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup>, and 51<sup>st</sup> Soviet Armies.<sup>19</sup> The success of the summer campaign of 1942 had "restored Germany's stature and influence over the satellite nations".<sup>20</sup> The *Wehrmacht*, having shaken off the difficulties at the gates of Moscow the previous winter, was once again riding high. Then came the fateful struggle for Stalingrad.

The winter of 1942 was the beginning of the end for Germany on the Eastern Front and indeed for the whole of the Third Reich. After a long and bitter bid for Stalingrad, the German war machine faltered. General Paulus and his 6<sup>th</sup> Army, approximately 275,000 strong, were surrounded.<sup>21</sup> A long and bitter siege ensued with the 6<sup>th</sup> Army unable or unwilling to try a breakout. Manstein's efforts to rescue the 6<sup>th</sup> Army would require an effort from 6<sup>th</sup> Army itself and Paulus and even Hitler himself would not support any such attempt.<sup>22</sup> Then, on 30<sup>th</sup> January, the southern pocket collapsed and Paulus was captured. The rest of the 6<sup>th</sup> Army surrendered two days later.<sup>23</sup> Along with the 6<sup>th</sup> Army, the Romanian 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, the Italian 8<sup>th</sup>, and the Hungarian 2<sup>nd</sup> Armies had ceased to exist as viable units.<sup>24</sup> The fiasco of Stalingrad was over and, with it, the invincibility of the German Army.

In an effort to turn back the tide to German favor in the east, Hitler called for reinforcements. Because of the unlikelihood of an invasion of France in 1943, he transferred a significant number of divisions to include the SS Panzer Corps from that theater to reinforce the Eastern Front.<sup>25,26,27</sup> These reinforcements proved useful in Manstein's brilliant counteroffensive in February after the Soviet offensive had run out of steam. In this counterstroke, the German forces were able to retake Khar'kov on the 14<sup>th</sup> of March. In fact, the German Army had restored the Donetsk front positions from Belgorod to the Mius River. These Donetsk and Mius fronts together formed the very same line as had been held by German troops in the winter of 1941-2.<sup>28</sup> The *rasputitsa*, or spring thaw, made movement of armor impossible and brought all major offensive movement to a halt.

The lull was a welcome respite for battle-weary forces to rest and replenish their ranks. Offensive operations would have to wait until the ground was dry enough to support the movement of armor. In the meantime, Hitler and the German High Command were drawn to a bulge in the line on their battle maps known as the Kursk salient, a feature that would not be

overlooked by Stalin or his generals. Thus, the stage was set for the German summer offensive of 1943 and the gamble that was the Kursk offensive.

### STRATEGIC MOTIVATIONS FOR THE OFFENSIVE

“The victory at Kursk must serve as a beacon to the world. Every officer and every man must be imbued with the significance of this attack.”

—Adolf Hitler<sup>29</sup>  
15 April 1943

At the beginning of 1943, Germany was clearly on the skids. Their defeat at Stalingrad and the massive Soviet offensive that followed took a great toll on the *Wehrmacht*. Not only was the loss in men and machine but in world prestige. Elsewhere, German forces were struggling for survival in North Africa and it was only a matter of time before the Allies would land in France. This Allied attack, however, was probably not imminent: “the invasion of North Africa by Britain and the United States in November 1942 signaled Hitler that the likelihood of an invasion of France in 1943 was slim. The plans made at Casablanca by Churchill and Roosevelt in January 1943, soon revealed to Hitler, confirmed that fact”.<sup>30</sup> This was the *Wehrmacht*’s last chance to focus on the Russian front without distraction. In addition, the other main Axis powers, Japan and Italy were having their own problems. Hitler had no faith in Italy’s desire or ability to fight off an Allied invasion and felt that such a landing was a real threat. Japan was struggling under the massive weight of America’s might and its overwhelming industrial capacity.<sup>31</sup> Hitler was greatly concerned about what effect all this would have on the satellite nations such as Romania and Hungary. Even of greater concern to Hitler was the desire to have Turkey join the Axis alliance. Bringing Turkey into the war on the side of the Axis powers was one of Hitler’s major objectives.<sup>32</sup> Turkey had already decided “not to attack the Soviet Union in the Caucasus”.<sup>33</sup>

There were also more immediate and practical reasons for the offensive. Among these were: (1) the destruction of the Red Army’s strategic reserve to prevent the Russians from launching any major offensives in 1943, (2) consolidation of the Eastern Front by eliminating the bulge at Kursk, thereby freeing up precious divisions that were badly needed on other fronts, and (3) the capture of the city of Kursk, a major hub, that if left in Soviet hands, would be of great benefit to future Soviet offensive operations and in German hands “would place the German High Command in a more favorable position for continuing the war in the east”.<sup>34,35</sup>

Hitler wanted to capitalize on Manstein’s brilliant counterstroke in February that restored the front lines in the south and show the world that Germany was on the move again. The Third

Reich would shine like a beacon for all the world to see. The word Hitler used was "*fanal*", it translates roughly as "a powerful signaling light", a beacon to the world of German power and resolve.<sup>36</sup> And this beacon would be victory at Kursk. It would bring Turkey into the fold, restore faith to the satellite nations and let the Allies know that the *Wehrmacht* was still a force to be reckoned with.<sup>37</sup>

## PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE

### GERMAN PREPARATIONS

The German planning for the battle of Kursk began in March, 1943.<sup>38,39</sup> The plan was proposed by the Chief of the Army General Staff, General Zeitzler, who "envisaged a double enveloping attack against the big Russian salient west of Kursk".<sup>40</sup> On 13 March 1943 Hitler released Operations Order No. 5 in which he stated the desire for a limited offensive:

Therefore, it is necessary for us to attack before the Russians on individual sections of the front as soon as possible and take the initiative into our hands in this fashion, on at least one sector of the front at the present (as is already the case with *Heeresgruppe Sud*). On the other sectors of the front we must allow the enemy to bleed to death. We must conscientiously plan our defenses in depth through use of heavy defensive weapons, development of positions, appropriately laid minefields, preparation of support positions, accumulation of mobile reserves and other measures.<sup>41</sup>

Here, Hitler's plan is clear, a localized offensive with the remainder of the front managed as a static defense line. The order gets more specific further on:

A strong *Panzer-Armee* is to immediately be formed on the northern wing of *Heeresgruppe Sud*. Its formation is to be completed by the middle of April so that it can go over to the offensive at the end of the mud season before the Russians. The goal of this offensive is the destruction of the enemy forces in front of the 2. *Armee* by means of an advance to the north from the area of Khar'kov in cooperation with an attack group from the zone of 2. *Panzer Armee*. Details of these attacks, the command and control structure and the moving up of forces will be given in separate orders.<sup>42</sup>

These separate orders were issued on 15 April 1943 as Operation Order No. 6, the rationale and design for 'Citadel', the offensive operation to eliminate the Kursk salient.<sup>43</sup>

Every officer and every man must be imbued with the significance of this attack. The victory at Kursk must serve as a beacon to the world.

Therefore I order:

1.) The objective of the attack is to surround the enemy forces in the Kursk sector and destroy them with concentric attacks. The attacks will be conducted incisively, in a coordinated manner, ruthlessly and rapidly by one field army

attacking from the area of Bjelgorod and one field army attacking from south of Orel.<sup>44</sup>

In support of these directives the *Wehrmacht* began preparations. The date for the offensive was first proposed to be 4 May, but a series of delays followed with the date being pushed back repeatedly until the final date of 5 July was solidified.<sup>45</sup> These delays, adding up to nearly nine weeks, voided the prospect of surprise. There were two primary reasons for delay. Colonel General Walter Model, and his 9<sup>th</sup> Army needed more time to procure the necessary manpower, supplies and equipment to properly prepare for the northern pincer of the attack<sup>46</sup> and Hitler's desire to have as many Mark V Panther tanks and Mark VI Tiger tanks as possible.<sup>47</sup> In addition to the forces already on the Eastern front, Hitler also transferred significant forces such as the SS Panzer Corps and the Adolf Hitler and Das Reich Divisions from the west.<sup>48,49,50</sup>

## RUSSIAN PREPARATIONS

The Soviet defenses on the northern and southern shoulders of the Kursk salient were formidable. Soviet preparations were initiated in late March. Soviet Marshal Georgi Zhukov had convinced Soviet Supreme Commander Josef Stalin that "it will be better if we wear the enemy out in defensive action, destroy his tanks, and then, taking in fresh reserves, by going over to an all-out offensive, we will finish off the enemies main grouping".<sup>51</sup> So Stalin and Zhukov decided "to meet the German attack with deeply echeloned defenses supplemented by counterattacks with reserves at every level".<sup>52</sup> "On much of the front there existed three "army" level defense lines, manned by units of a given army, three "front" lines, manned by front reserves and two reserve lines manned by the Steppe Front, a total of eight lines".<sup>53,54</sup> These echeloned defenses were heavily fortified with thousands of anti-armor mines, tank trenches, elaborate barbed wire placements and a network of "mutually supporting strong points".<sup>55</sup> As positions were overrun the defenders would merely retreat to the next line where they would be reinforced by fresh defenders. This was known as elastic defense and was very effective in thwarting the advancing Germans on both shoulders of the salient. This elastic defense allowed for maximum resistance with minimum casualties.<sup>56</sup>

Between April and July the Soviets formed an entire Army Group — "the Steppe Front"<sup>57</sup> commanded by Colonel General I. S. Konev and consisting of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Armies, the 27<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup> and 53<sup>rd</sup> Armies, the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Tank Army, the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Army and various additional corps numbering a total force of 573,195 men.<sup>58</sup> This massive force was located at the nexus of the Center and Voronezh Fronts just behind the Kursk Bulge.<sup>59,60</sup> The purpose of this front was

to be a strategic reserve to contain any breakthroughs during the German attack, and to be the primary force to go on the offensive once the enemy attack had stalled.<sup>61</sup> The presence of this front behind the Kursk salient was not discovered by the German High Command due to a very meticulous and elaborate “tactical deception plan (*maskirovka*)”. Execution of *maskirovka* was by “active and passive means” and included “false trenches, dummy tanks and artillery, notional tank dispersal areas, and false airfields”.<sup>62,63</sup> Largely due to these efforts, “German intelligence failed to detect ten armies” and thus, were not aware of much of the strategic reserves behind the Kursk salient.<sup>64</sup>

By the summer of 1943, the Russians had developed a sophisticated intelligence process called “the Soviet *razvedka* system” operated by the General Staff’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), “a well-articulated centralized structure to assess intelligence data”. The Soviets using “agent, air, and radio means” with the corroboration of British intelligence reports were able to “determine German offensive intent” at Kursk.<sup>65</sup> This information allowed the Soviet Headquarters of the Supreme High Command (STAVKA) to prepare defenses and position reserves to absorb the attack, as they were able to determine the main points of penetration.<sup>66,67</sup> Moscow was also receiving information about the proposed offensive from various intelligence networks, the most relevant of which were the “Lucy Spy Ring” based in Lucerne, Switzerland, where informants from the German High Command were leaking key information directly to the Soviets and the British Ultra effort, based in Bletchley Park, England, where German transmissions were intercepted and decoded using the captured Enigma codes. Rudolf Rossler—code named “Lucy”— handled an informant named “Werther” among other high level German informants.<sup>68</sup> Werther was a contact that had direct access to the German High Command. On 1 July 1943, when Hitler gave orders that the Kursk offensive would begin “between July 4 and July 6, Werther managed to pass this information to Moscow “within twenty-four hours”. The Soviets, after analyzing all sources of intelligence, concluded that the likely window of attack was between July 3 and July 6.<sup>69,70,71</sup> In his book “Hitler’s Traitor”, Kilzer goes on to argue that Werther may have been Martin Bormann, Hitler’s personal secretary.<sup>72</sup> At the end of March 1943, the British revealed to STAVKA information about the Kursk offensive that they received from “interpretation of Luftwaffe ‘Enigma’ transmissions by the Ultra team in Bletchley Park” although they did not reveal to the Soviets how they acquired this information.<sup>73,74</sup> David Glantz, in his book “The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II” asserts that although Werther and Ultra “provided valuable material regarding overall enemy intentions”, the Soviets relied mostly on their “intricate network of *razvedka* sources that covered the entire combat spectrum”.<sup>75</sup> The Soviets possessed a thorough and

comprehensive intelligence network that ranged from the tactical battlefield to the highest levels of the German command structure. This system was critical in preparing for and consequently thwarting the German attack.

## **THE BATTLE**

### **THE TERRAIN**

The Kursk region rests on a plateau called the Central Russian Uplands (see 'Figure 1' on page 10 for a map of the Kursk region and opposing force dispositions). This terrain is largely rolling plateau, sparsely populated with small groves of trees. This open country, with few obstacles to impede free movement, was good terrain for the movement of armored forces. The main obstacles were the rivers. In the south, the Northern Donets, southeast of Belgorod and east of Khar'kov, had high banks that created a natural barrier, making forward movement in this region difficult, if not impossible. Other notable rivers included the Psel, the Vorskla, and the Seim River, which ran through the city of Kursk from east to west. Rivers that ran along the defensive lines created natural barriers for the Soviet defenses and allowed defenders to predict likely routes for attacking forces and prepare defenses accordingly. When it was dry, most of the rivers were generally fordable; however, after even fairly short cloudbursts, the areas around these streams and rivers became a muddy mess that seriously impeded any efforts to move armor.<sup>76</sup> In the spring, it would generally rain all along the Eastern Front, causing nearly all offensive operations to shut down and wait for the dryer weather of the early summer before resuming. The railway system was the primary means of movement for armor and men, and the Germans used rail extensively. As one moved eastward toward the Russian areas, however, the railway network was sparse and reliance on trucks was necessary for rapid and efficient movement of men and supplies. Here, the trucks provided by Lend-Lease were of great importance to Russian mobility during combat operations.<sup>77</sup> The only paved road in the Kursk area was one that ran from Orel to Kursk and on to Belgorod, then Khar'kov. This was the only suitable road for armor movement. The remaining roads were largely dirt and unable to withstand sustained armor traffic.<sup>78</sup>

## THE FORCES

The following table (TABLE 1) and figure (FIGURE 1 on page 9) shows the numbers and dispositions of the opposing forces.

	Force Description	Personnel	Guns/ Mortars	Tanks/ Assault Guns	Aircraft
GERMAN	9 <sup>th</sup> Army	335,000	3,630	920	
	4 <sup>th</sup> Panzer Army	223,907	1,774	1,089	
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Army	110,000	940	31	
	Army Det. Kempf	108,000	1073	419	
	VIII Air Corps				1100
	1 <sup>st</sup> Air Division				730
	TOTAL German	777,000	7,417	2,451	1830
RUSSIAN	Central Front	711,575	12,453	1,785	1,050
	Voronezh Front	625,591	9,751	1,704	881
	Steppe Front	573,195	9,211	1,639	563
	17 <sup>th</sup> Air Army				735
	Bomber Command				320
	TOTAL Russian	1,910,361	31,415	5,128	3,549

TABLE 1. DATA COMPILED FROM ZETTERLING AND FRANKSON<sup>79</sup>



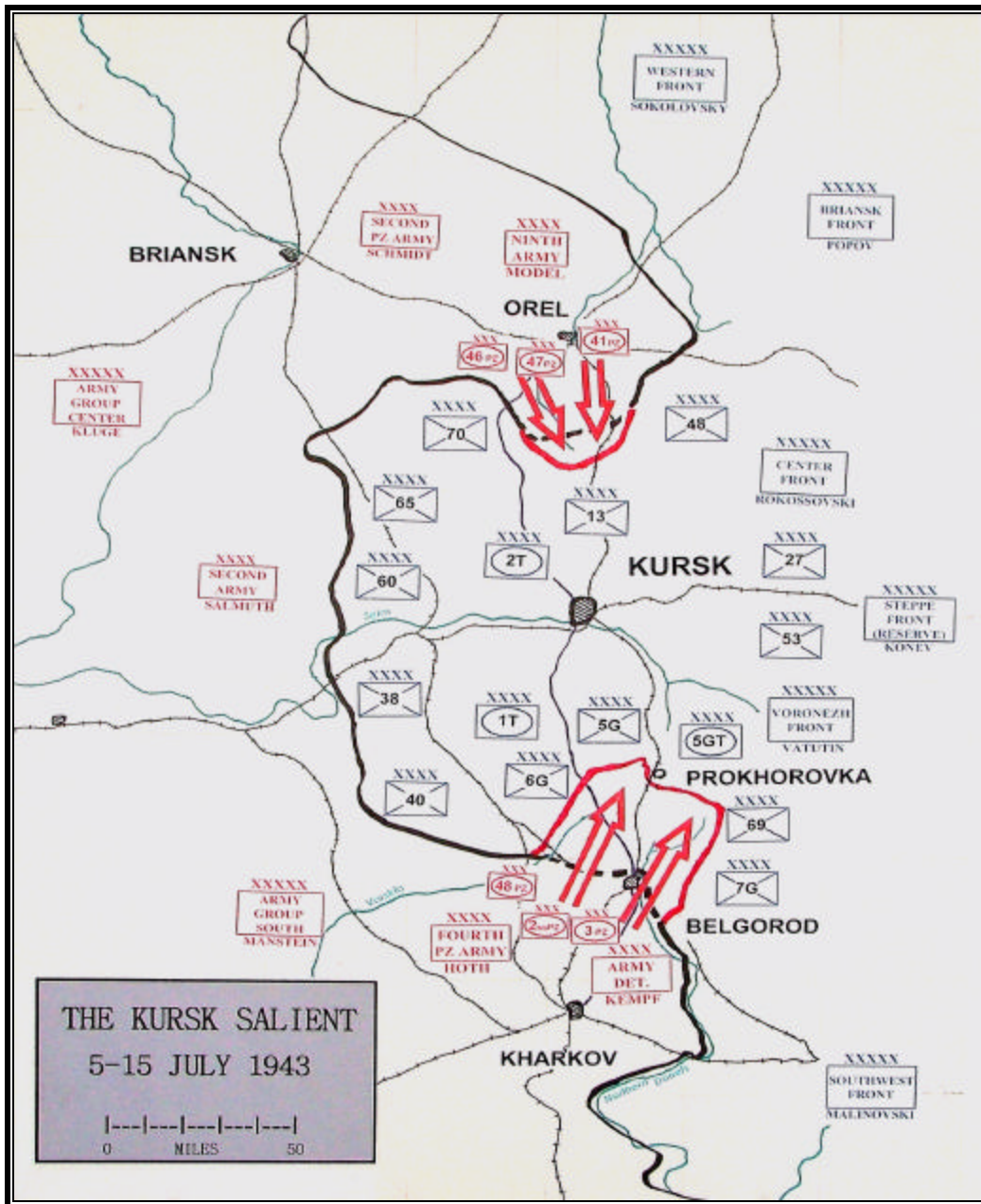


FIGURE 1. THE GERMAN ATTACK ON THE KURSK SALIENT 5-15 JULY 1943  
(MAP CONSTRUCTED FROM MULTIPLE DATA SOURCES)<sup>80,81,82,83</sup>

## THE ATTACK

### **The 9<sup>th</sup> Army in the North**

At around 0200 on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, the Russians captured a German sapper who revealed that the main German attack would be at 0300 the same day. At around 0220, the Russians began an artillery assault against German artillery positions as well as the believed assembly areas of the attacking forces.<sup>84</sup> The Germans launched their own artillery barrage at 0430, followed by a 0530 attack of the main Panzer forces: the 9<sup>th</sup> Army's 46<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup>, and 41<sup>st</sup> Panzer Corps running from west to east.<sup>85</sup> The Soviet 13<sup>th</sup> army, arranged in three echelons, around 150,000 strong, received the brunt of the attack.<sup>86</sup> By the end of fighting on the 5<sup>th</sup> of July, the 9<sup>th</sup> Army had breached the first line of defense. They had penetrated an area 15 kilometers wide and 8 kilometers deep. But the cost was high; approximately 20% of Model's armor was rendered unusable after the first day of fighting.<sup>87</sup>

On the 6<sup>th</sup> of July, the Russians responded with a powerful counterattack that was repelled by the Germans, resulting in many Russian casualties. By the end of the day, the Germans had regained lost territory and reached the second Soviet defensive belt in the center of the attack front area. In subsequent days, Model reinforced his attacking forces with additional Panzer divisions and continued his attempts to create a breakthrough.<sup>88</sup> But as German efforts increased to push the Red Army back, so did the Russian's efforts to augment their defenses further with additional units and thus repel their attackers:

As soon as the blazing cauldron of fire had consumed one force, another would arrive to replace it and stoke the flames of combat. This was attrition war with a vengeance. Unless the German armored spearheads achieved operational freedom beyond the Soviet tactical defenses, resources and sheer willpower would determine the outcome of this bitter struggle. Model was resolved to achieve that operational freedom; Pukhov and Rokossovsky were equally determined to deny him the opportunity.<sup>89</sup>

On the 11th of July, Field Marshal von Kluge released two more divisions for Model's offensive but this did little to effect a breakthrough. This was the last day that would see concentrated offensive efforts by the Germans in the north. On the 12th, the Soviets counterattacked along the 2nd Panzer Army front around Orel. This attack forced the Germans to divert forces from Model's offensive to go to the aid of the 2nd Panzer Army to repel these attacks.<sup>90</sup> Subsequent days saw more of Model's 9th Army units going over to the defensive in vain efforts to repel massive Soviet counterattacks along the Russian Central and Briansk fronts. This ended the northern pincer of the assault on the Kursk salient. All hopes of victory now depended exclusively on Manstein and his armies in the south. The stalled northern

assault allowed Red Army forces to focus on the southern attack, victory in the south would be that much more difficult for the *Wehrmacht*.

#### **The 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf in the South**

At 1600 on 4 July, the 48<sup>th</sup> Panzer Corps launched a reconnaissance-in-force on the southern shoulder of the Kursk salient. This was to eliminate enemy outposts and observation points so that the subsequent main attack force could directly engage the first main line of defense.<sup>91</sup> Shortly after midnight, a powerful thunderstorm added to the confusion of the efforts in the German assembly areas. Then, at around 0110 on 5 July, to further obfuscate the German effort, the Soviet artillery struck in earnest all along the Voronezh front. By most accounts this artillery barrage seriously frustrated the attack effort.<sup>92</sup> The main German attack came at 0600 after an intense two-hour preparatory artillery barrage.<sup>93</sup> The Fourth Panzer Army and Army Detachment Kempf struck the southern shoulder of the Kursk salient in the vicinity of Belgorod. The 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army's 48<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer Corps were the spearhead of the attack, supported on the right flank by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps and Corps Raus from Army Detachment Kempf. Army Detachment Kempf was to protect the eastern flank of the 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army's penetration.<sup>94</sup> These four corps slammed into the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Guards Armies of the Voronezh Front. Elements of the 48<sup>th</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer Corps advanced nearly nine kilometers into the Soviet defenses on the first day.<sup>95</sup>

On the second day, the 6<sup>th</sup>, the armored spearheads of the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS and 48<sup>th</sup> Panzer Corps continued their attacks and their weight was making an impression on the defending Soviet forces. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps under Army Detachment Kempf had pushed across the Northern Donets and solidified its bridgeheads there. By evening, the Voronezh Front had committed all its reserves except for three rifle divisions. The Stavka, or Soviet Command, then decided to reinforce the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Guards with two tank corps and the 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Army from the Steppe Front Reserve. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of July, the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Corps had penetrated the Soviet defenses to a depth of 28 kilometers. The 48<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps also made progress. The Red Army shifted forces to contain the armored onslaught. The 8<sup>th</sup> of July saw a number of Russian counterattacks that were effectively defeated by both German air and ground forces. The 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Army was also pulled into the fight here, as were other Soviet units as the breach deepened. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps secured and consolidated its front lines, the 48<sup>th</sup> Panzer Corps pushed deeper. The Red Army responded by bringing up the 38<sup>th</sup> Army to stop the advancing 48<sup>th</sup> Panzer Corps and moving the 27<sup>th</sup>, 53<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Guards Armies forward. The following day saw continued German advances that included a bridgehead across the River

Psel. The STAVKA ordered the preparation of elements of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Guards Army and the 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Army to form a counterattack on July 12<sup>th</sup>. Efforts on the 11<sup>th</sup> of July were hampered by rain; however, units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer Corps continued their push for Prokhorovka and 3<sup>rd</sup> Panzer Corps forces made significant advances on the eastern area of the attack front. As planned, the Russians massed against the 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army's spearhead intent on destroying this force.<sup>96</sup> On the early morning of the 12<sup>th</sup>, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Corps and 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Corps of the 5<sup>th</sup> Tank Guards Army slammed headlong into the advancing divisions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer Corps. Of the three divisions of the 2<sup>nd</sup> SS Panzer Corps, the *Leibstandarte* Division got the brunt of it. The battle raged on into the late afternoon and involved hundreds of tanks from both sides. The Soviet forces took disproportionate losses during these clashes and eventually had to go on the defensive. When the smoke finally cleared, the Russian units set up defensive positions and went about assembling the remnants of their forces for the next day's attacks.<sup>97</sup> This attack was the most notable of the famous clashes of armor around Prokhorovka.<sup>98</sup>

The Fourth Panzer Army's penetration in the vicinity of Prokhorovka was the high water mark of the Kursk offensive. This was where German forces came the closest to achieving freedom of action. Apparently, at one point the 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Corps was on the verge of breaking through and achieving the freedom of movement that would be the key to success. In fact, "So convinced was von Manstein that he could prevail at Kursk, he was prepared to commit his operational reserve, the XXIV Panzer Corps" to capitalize on this breach. General Werner Kempf, the commander of Army Detachment Kempf, and Colonel General Hermann Hoth, the commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Panzer Army, strongly agreed with Manstein. "At the least, von Manstein was convinced his forces could complete the task of destroying Soviet strategic reserves".<sup>99</sup> The Fourth Panzer Army in the south had been largely successful at the time the attack was called off.<sup>100</sup> On July 13, "Hitler ruled that 'Citadel' was to be called off on account of the situation in the Mediterranean and the state of affairs in Central Army Group" effectively ending the Kursk offensive and any future major offenses by the *Wehrmacht* on the Eastern Front once and for all.<sup>101</sup> What followed was a continuous series of Soviet offensives that sent the *Wehrmacht* reeling and finally collapsing at the gates of Berlin in May of 1945.

#### **WHY THE ATTACK FAILED**

So why did the German attack fail? Multiple delays, German underestimation of the opposing Soviet forces, STAVKA's ability to predict the site of the attack through intelligence were some key reasons and will be explained in the following paragraphs.

The delay from April 30 to July 5<sup>102</sup> as a cause for the defeat is controversial. Some, such as Field Marshall Manstein, argued that the delay allowed the Red Army to reinforce and prepare the shoulders of the salient.<sup>103</sup> Others say that the German Army was ill prepared to start the attack sooner. As we have noted: Model, and his 9<sup>th</sup> Army needed more time to procure the necessary manpower, supplies and equipment to properly prepare for the northern pincer of the attack<sup>104</sup> and Hitler wanted to have as many Mark V Panther tanks and Mark VI Tiger tanks as possible.<sup>105</sup>

The *Wehrmacht* grossly underestimated Russian forces on the Central Front. Soviet forces opposite Model's 9<sup>th</sup> Army were "at least four times as strong in terms of infantry, and nearly twice as strong in terms of tanks, than they expected".<sup>106</sup> German artillery intelligence estimates were also grossly underestimated in this sector: "Russian artillery strength would have exceeded 1,800 guns in the assault zone—650 more than the Germans estimated".<sup>107</sup> The Germans also failed to detect the Steppe Reserve Front deployed in the area behind the Kursk salient in the spring and early summer of 1943: "German intelligence failed to detect ten armies" and thus were not aware of much of the strategic reserves behind the Kursk salient.<sup>108</sup> These underestimations were in no small part the result of elaborate deception measures by the Soviets as previously mentioned.

As previously explained, the Soviets had perfected an elaborate intelligence-gathering network. The GRU's "razvedka system" with the corroboration of other intelligence reports were able to "determine German offensive intent" at Kursk.<sup>109</sup> This allowed the Red Army to focus all of its efforts at reinforcing the Kursk area with men, armor and elaborate defense networks. This was probably the most critical element of Soviet success because it allowed the Red Army to mass its considerable resources on a very narrow area of the front.

There were other factors that also should be considered: (1) the growing competence and operational flexibility of the Red Army units, (2) a lack of German infantry divisions and (3) the psychological boost to Soviet forces after the defeat of the *Wehrmacht* at Stalingrad. In addressing the first issue, Russian units were becoming more agile: "As a general rule, the Germans apparently missed—almost completely—the extent to which the Red Army had managed to reintroduce corps headquarters as an intermediate level of command. This error had little impact on strength estimates but a tremendous influence on any appreciation of Soviet operational and tactical flexibility".<sup>110</sup> Also, tank destroyer brigades, made up of SU-152s and other mechanized platforms were detached for flexibility. Many of these brigades were deployed reinforcing the northern and southern shoulders of the salient. These heavy artillery brigades were subordinate to the armies and fronts and not attached to specific frontline

divisions.<sup>111</sup> This allowed the Red Army to focus incredible firepower in narrow areas along the German attack fronts. The lack of German infantry divisions was another issue. General Theodor Busse, Chief of Staff, Army Group South, cited the inadequate number of Infantry divisions as a critical factor. "The lack of sufficient infantry divisions forced us to employ the mobile units from the outset". This also contributed to many of the spearhead armored units having to cover their own flanks encumbering forward progress.<sup>112</sup> Finally, the confidence of the Russians after Stalingrad was rising. Germany was no longer invincible. No longer were German *blitzkrieg* tactics a surprise to their adversary.

It is important to note that the Germans continued with preparations for the attack even as aerial reconnaissance showed continual build up of Soviet defenses both in sophistication and depth.<sup>113</sup> This indicates that the German High Command continued to believe in their ability to overwhelm any Russian defense no matter how well entrenched or how elaborate. This belief was well founded. Except when German divisions had been overextended at Moscow in the winter of 1941, they had enjoyed nearly total freedom of movement on the Russian Steppe crushing numerous Soviet armies and with them millions of Russian soldiers. They had been stopped at Stalingrad, true enough, but that was urban terrain and it stifled the free movement of armor. But much of the terrain around Kursk was open and rolling only sparsely populated with trees, nearly perfect country for what the *Wehrmacht* was best at, outmaneuvering the enemy and destroying it *en masse*.

Although all these things taken together created a cumulative effect that the Germans were unable to overcome, the key reasons for defeat were threefold and interrelated. First, Russian intelligence was able to predict precisely where and when the attack would occur and consequently allowed for the heavy reinforcement of the Russian defenses on the north and south shoulders of the salient. Finally *Stavka* deception efforts were successful in causing the Germans to grossly underestimate Soviet forces around the area of Kursk, specifically the Steppe Reserve Front which was not discovered and the defending forces on the northern shoulder of the salient were grossly underestimated.

## **STRATEGIC ANALYSIS**

In 1941, although the Eastern front was as wide as the continent of Russia itself, the *Wehrmacht's* strategic focus was on destroying Soviet forces. The Soviet Army was the center of gravity: Directive No. 21, "Operation Barbarossa": "The mass of the [Red] Army stationed in Western Russia is to be destroyed" and later in the order "withdrawal of elements capable of combat into the extensive Russian land spaces is to be prevented". Capturing Moscow became

the focus only when, late in 1941, the Red Army showed no signs of relinquishing the struggle.<sup>114</sup> The capture of Moscow was nearly achieved by December of 1941 when German men and armor literally had Moscow in their sites. Then on the 11<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, 4 days after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor; Hitler declared war against the United States.<sup>115</sup> This was an interesting move by Hitler in light of the fact that the Germans had already bitten off more than they could chew in North Africa and on the Eastern front.

The summer offensive of 1942 reflected a strategic shift to the Caucasus in the south with a secondary focus on the northern city of Leningrad.<sup>116,117</sup> This new focus, as previously described, was to prevent Lend-Lease equipment and supplies from the U.S. and England from getting into Russia from their northern and southern routes<sup>118</sup> but more importantly, “taking possession of the Caucasus with its oil resources”.<sup>119</sup> There was also the issue of Turkey; a successful campaign in the south would go a long way in securing an alliance.<sup>120</sup> Stalingrad was to be captured to secure the isthmus of the Volga and the Don.<sup>121</sup> The perceived importance of Stalingrad grew, as summer became winter. Initially the aim was to “eliminate the armaments factories there and secure a position on the Volga” but then Hitler “ignored the strategic rationale” the “Sixth Army would take and occupy Stalingrad”.<sup>122</sup> For Hitler, the struggle for Stalingrad became an obsession devoid of strategic purpose: “he now had to capture the city which bore Stalin’s name, as though this in itself would achieve subjugation of the enemy”.<sup>123</sup> The final investment of men and armor far exceeded the strategic importance here and the Wehrmacht paid dearly with the loss of the powerful 6<sup>th</sup> Army and four satellite armies.

In early 1943, following the defeat at Stalingrad, Germany’s strategic picture had changed significantly. Prior to Kursk, the assumption in the west was that the war on the Eastern Front would be indecisive with one side winning battles at first and then the other.<sup>124</sup> “It would still have been conceivable to force stalemate if Germany’s military leadership had been adapted to such a solution”.<sup>125</sup> This assertion is arguable; Germany was not in a strong position to negotiate. The conflict was taking its toll on the *Wehrmacht* and contributions by Italian, Romanian, and Hungarian forces on the Eastern Front were rapidly decreasing while the Red Army was growing stronger.<sup>126</sup> According to Manstein, “Hitler would not accept giving up the Donetz area. He feared the repercussions on Turkey, for one thing. Most of all, he stressed the economic importance of Donetz coal to Germany’s war economy and the effect on the enemy of continuing to be deprived of it”. Manstein questioned the suitability of the coal in the Donetz region for use in industry in the first place.<sup>127</sup> Thus, Hitler was “pre-occupied with the economic

aspects of the Donetz basin and apprehensive about the possible repercussions of an even temporary evacuation on the attitudes of Turkey and Rumania".<sup>128</sup>

"Hitler was correct in arguing that 1943 would be the last year in which the absence of an actual threat in the West permitted a maximum effort in Russia. As far as time was concerned, this was the last opportunity to deliver a crushing blow to Soviet offensive power before an invasion occurred in the west".<sup>129</sup> This may have been true but arguably a "crushing blow" or "forehand stroke", as Manstein referred to it, was no longer strategically feasible in light of the limited resources and multiple fronts of the Wehrmacht versus the overwhelming superiority in numbers and the regenerative capacity of the Red Army.

Outside the Eastern Front, there were other issues of grave importance to Nazi Germany. The landings by British and American forces on North Africa in November of 1942 had produced results: Tunisia was lost to the Germans on May 12, 1943. With Germany out of North Africa, the soft underbelly of Europe was open to Allied attack. This attack, in fact, began with the allied landings of Patton's and Montgomery's armies on the island of Sicily July 10, 1943 when the Battle of Kursk was in full swing.<sup>130</sup>

### **WAS KURSK DECISIVE?**

Germany clearly suffered a crushing defeat at Kursk. The *Wehrmacht* did not destroy sizeable enemy forces and didn't eliminate STAVKA's intention to conduct a major offensive in 1943. Neither did the German Army achieve freedom of action nor consolidate their line. Germany had also used up much of its reserves.<sup>131</sup> But was Kursk a decisive defeat or just another step in a series of defeats suffered by the *Wehrmacht*? To adequately address this, we must look at a number of strategic issues. These include attrition and replacement rates of men and armor, intelligence, ability of each side to focus their effort and political issues.

There is some speculation about German losses at Kursk being a decisive factor to the final outcome of the war. Total German losses at Kursk "were 56,827 men, which amounted to roughly 3 percent of the total 1,601,454 men the Germans lost in Russia during 1943".<sup>132</sup> The ability to reform the units suffering these losses was the real problem: "The armored formations, reformed and re-equipped with so much effort, had lost heavily in both men and equipment and would now be unemployable for a long time to come". Colonel General Heinz Guderian goes on to write: "It was problematic whether they could be rehabilitated in time to defend the Eastern front".<sup>133</sup> It is difficult to argue with the fact that the attrition of German forces and consequently, the loss of an available strategic reserve allowed the Soviets to quickly capitalize and overwhelm the German at specific points following Kursk.



Another often discussed reason that Germany was unable to defeat the Red Army was the incredible Russian capacity to generate forces, albeit poorly trained, but in this case quantity made up for what it lacked in quality. The Red Army, although often clumsy and awkward, had one thing going for it: nearly inexhaustible manpower. It “took the form of successive waves of newly mobilized armies, each taking its toll of the invaders before shattering and being replaced by the next wave. Its mobilization capability saved the Soviet Union from destruction in 1941 and again in 1942”.<sup>134</sup>

As efficient a killing machine the *Wehrmacht* was, even it had its limits to the men and machines it could destroy—one would be hard pressed to find a better example of attrition on a massive scale. It is important to point out, however, that even with the amazing capacity for the Soviets to generate man and machine in huge numbers, the assumption that the *Wehrmacht* would lose to a battle of attrition was not a foregone conclusion.<sup>135</sup> The effectiveness of the *Wehrmacht* at destroying Soviet forces had not dropped off significantly in 1943. The German army continued to destroy Russian armor and men at an alarming rate. Even in 1943, this rate was disproportionate to Germany's own losses by a wide margin. Zetterling and Frankson show total German losses for 1943 at 1,803,755 (1,442,654 in combat) versus Russian losses for the same period at 7,857,503. Additionally this source shows *Wehrmacht* tank and assault gun losses on all fronts to be 8,067 in 1943 while the Red Army lost 23,500. Meanwhile, replacement numbers for tanks and assault guns were 10,747 for the Germans and 24,006 for the Russians.<sup>136</sup> Although these figures do not reflect Lend-Lease equipment delivered to the Red Army, they still offer a strong argument that attrition and replacement numbers alone did not give the Russians a decisive advantage in the war. In fact, according to Zetterling and Frankson, attrition rates favored Germany: “it was the Red Army which could be expected to run out of men first”.<sup>137</sup> This attrition argument, however, is only valid if the Germans, like the Soviets, could focus all their resources on the Eastern Front.

The *Wehrmacht* had other demands on their military resources. The *Wehrmacht's* would increasingly need to dilute their limited forces over a several fronts, while the Russians could continue to focus their entire effort against the *Wehrmacht*. This was because Stalin was able to ignore Japan as a threat. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and its ensuing war with the United States “eased Soviet concerns over her eastern borders and permitted wholesale shifting of reserves from the Far East, Trans-Baikal, and Siberia to help relieve the military crisis at Moscow”.<sup>138</sup> Also “The Red Orchestra”, or Soviet Intelligence had ascertained through Richard Sorge (code named *Ramzaia*) that Japan had no intention of attacking Russia.<sup>139</sup>

The factors working against Hitler's Germany were multiple. To point to a battle such as Kursk as the decisive action in the war ignores many other factors, some of which are enumerated above. Yes, the German offensive at Kursk wore down the German ability to respond to the Soviet counteroffensive and consequently accelerated the *Wehrmacht's* destruction on the Eastern Front, but this in itself is not decisive. Webster's Dictionary defines "decisive" as "having the power or quality of determining". In this light, we must look at two other fateful events on the Eastern Front: the Soviet counteroffensive around Moscow in December of 1941, and the fateful siege of the German 6<sup>th</sup> Army at Stalingrad in 1942. If any one of these clashes could be ruled as decisive, it would probably be Stalingrad, because after Stalingrad, German victory over the Soviets was highly improbable. It follows then that in the spring of 1943, Germany's fate was already sealed. After Kursk, we see a cascade of crushing defeats of the *Wehrmacht* from which it never recovered. In this context, however, we can say that the Battle of Kursk was pivotal, defined as "of critical importance", because it marked a clear turning point where the Germans lost the strategic initiative and the Soviets gained it.

### **ALTERNATIVE COURSES OF ACTION**

Although in the summer of 1943, the German High Command had no real chance of turning the tide against the Soviets, it clearly had options that in large part could have altered the course and severity of their defeat. The prospect of a major "offensive on the scale of 1941 and 1942" was now a lost dream.<sup>140</sup> There were three courses of action available to Hitler: (1) go on a localized offensive while the remainder of the front employed a static defense; (2) conduct a static defense along the entire front; or (3) employ a mobile, flexible defense with well placed and timed counterattacks supported by a deeply echeloned strategic line of defense.

The first option, and the one chosen by Hitler and which we have discussed in some detail was to go on the offensive in powerful localized attacks while the remainder of the front maintained a static defense. Manstein put it this way: "in dealing the enemy powerful blows of a localized character which would sap his strength to a decisive degree".<sup>141</sup> As we have noted, this approach was very risky at best and thus had unrealistic expectations of success. The result has been recorded in the annals of history.

The second option would have been a static defense along the entire front. However, to defend a 2,000-kilometer front with limited forces would have been a monumental undertaking. The idea of a static defense along the entire front was not realistic. There were simply not enough German divisions to do this effectively.<sup>142</sup>

The third option would be to employ a mobile, flexible defense with well-placed and timed counterattacks supported by a deeply echeloned strategic line of defense. If successful this could bleed the Russians to the point where they could be amenable to a negotiated stalemate or at the least severely frustrate and delay the attacking Red Army. This option will now be discussed in some detail.

General Gunther Blumentritt, Deputy Chief of Staff under Chief of Staff Franz Halder describes the concept of “delaying action battle” where: “There are strategic and tactical situations, in which it can be shown that the battle, in the total sense, should be conducted neither offensively nor defensively but primarily in a ‘delaying manner’”. In a situation where opposing forces are pressing a weakened front “it is logical to order this front to conduct operations in a delaying manner and thereby to avoid exposing themselves to defeat or to heavy losses” and in order to preserve the army’s strength “they should be led to a secure and well consolidated position”.<sup>143</sup> The concept of “delaying action battle” is not unlike the Soviet concept of elastic defense previously discussed where as defensive lines are overrun by attacking forces the defending forces merely withdrawal to prepared defensive lines behind the first. This action attrites the attacking forces while preserving the combat capability of the defending force. Blumentritt explains “two suppositions have to be made”. One, a compelling leader willing to accept responsibility and two, a high command that will permit such freedom of action. Blumentritt goes on to state that the German High Command from 1939-1945 did not permit such flexible actions.<sup>144</sup>

The idea of a strategic line of defense was considered a way to secure the Eastern Front as the balance-of-forces were more and more in favor of Russia. General Olbricht, Chief of the General Army Office, submitted a proposal in January 1942 advocating “immediate construction of a strategic defense line in the East, utilizing extensively the manpower of the replacement army”. This 2,000 kilometer “deeply echeloned defense line” would consist of reinforced positions primarily along the Dniepr River. Olbricht’s proposal required 250,000 men and 100 days to complete. These men would not be front line troops but supplemental labor and soldiers that weren’t fit for frontline combat duty. Hitler forbade such preparations in a letter written around the end of March 1942: “our eyes are always fixed forward,” Hitler had said. Olbricht had also been told that Hitler believed the frontline troops would be tempted to withdraw to such a line. Olbricht later had said of the letter: “a historical document that may once be very important to us”.<sup>145</sup> Arguably, such a line of defense would have delayed the Russian advance significantly and reduced the immense suffering incurred by the German people in the hands of a vengeful Red Army.

Major offensives along the scale of 1941 & 1942 were no longer tenable due to the loss of major German formations. However, the idea of limited offensive actions at critical times and places to hinder and frustrate the efforts of the Russians were not only possible but probably the most efficient use of limited forces to confound Russian offensive efforts and the best way to slow the Russian advance or even to force a stalemate.<sup>146</sup> The best way to time these offensive actions was to strike where the Red Army was most vulnerable: at the culmination of an offensive attack and then “to hit them hard on the backhand at the first opportunity”.<sup>147</sup>

A stalemate was certainly entertained by some Generals such as Manstein. The attrition rates of the Russians even in 1943 were incredible.<sup>148</sup> It's not unreasonable to assume after two long years of horrible losses that the Russians would have considered such a prospect if the German attack at Kursk was successful. However, the feasibility of a negotiated ceasefire or peace is difficult to ascertain. It is doubtful that this was a real possibility, especially after the Allies decision, in 1942, to force the Third Reich into unconditional surrender. Additionally, after all the suffering the *Wehrmacht* inflicted on Russia and her people, wasn't Stalin bent on pounding the Germans back into Berlin?

Such ideas were all for naught in 1943 or any other time during the Russian campaign. Hitler's “refusal to accept that elasticity of operations which, in the conditions obtaining from 1943 onwards, could be achieved only by a voluntary, if temporary surrender of conquered territory”, showed his lack of appreciation for such operations.<sup>149</sup> “A ‘Fanal’ or beacon to the world of German resolve” maybe a sound strategic goal, but no longer consistent with military reality. Trying to reconcile the reality of the battlefield with this lofty strategic goal was not sound reasoning. Finally, Hitler's repeated rejection of a mobile defense and a strategic line of defense simply because he didn't want to give up any ground had no relevance to sound military strategy.

## CONCLUSION

After Stalingrad, it became apparent that the *Wehrmacht* would probably not achieve decisive victory over the Red Army. In light of this, the *Wehrmacht* should not have dedicated so many of its precious and limited forces to an attack that had only a limited chance of success. The war was taking its toll on the *Wehrmacht*; from 22 June 1941 – 1 July 1943 the German Army had lost 3,950,000 men on all fronts.<sup>150</sup> Germany was running out of options. They had succeeded in angering the most powerful nations in the world into a total war footing aimed at smashing the Third Reich into unconditional surrender. The United States, the Soviet Union and Great Britain and all the resources these nations could muster proved to be too

overwhelming; even for the *Wehrmacht*, arguably one of the most well trained, equipped and disciplined armies that the world has ever seen. Hitler's attempt to make the Kursk offensive a "shining beacon" of German resolve, a lofty strategic goal, was unattainable on the battlefields of the Eastern Front in 1943. The best the *Wehrmacht* could have hoped for in the summer of 1943 was to delay the advance of the massive Red Army and reduce the impact of Germany's defeat. This would have been best achieved by a mobile, flexible defense with well-placed and timed counterattacks supported by a deeply echeloned strategic line of defense. It is apparent that Hitler would have none of this sound strategic reasoning.

WORD COUNT= 9,004

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*. (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1952), 308-309.
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- <sup>3</sup> IBID., 81-83.
- <sup>4</sup> IBID., 118-122
- <sup>5</sup> IBID., 132-133.
- <sup>6</sup> Alan Clark, *Barbarossa: The Russian-German Conflict, 1941-45* (New York, NY: Quill, 1985), 142-143.
- <sup>7</sup> IBID., 145.
- <sup>8</sup> Glantz, *Barbarossa: Hitler's Invasion of Russia 1941*, 144-153.
- <sup>9</sup> IBID., 182.
- <sup>10</sup> David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1995), 85.
- <sup>11</sup> Glantz, *Barbarossa: Hitler's Invasion of Russia 1941*, 185.
- <sup>12</sup> Clark, 147.
- <sup>13</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 91.
- <sup>14</sup> Clark, 210.
- <sup>15</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 110.
- <sup>16</sup> Clark, 209-210.
- <sup>17</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 110-111.
- <sup>18</sup> Clark, 208.
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- <sup>20</sup> Walter S. Dunn, Jr. *Kursk: Hitler's Gamble, 1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 2.
- <sup>21</sup> Antony Beevor, *Stalingrad: The Fateful Siege: 1942-1943*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 439-440.
- <sup>22</sup> IBID., 296-299.

<sup>23</sup> Clark, 287.

<sup>24</sup> Dunn, 37.

<sup>25</sup> IBID., xiii-xiv.

<sup>26</sup> David M. Glantz *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II*. (Navato, CA: Presidio Press, 1990), 223.

<sup>27</sup> Dunn, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, ed. Anthony G. Powell. (Navato, CA: Presidio Press, 1982), 436-437.

<sup>29</sup> Franz Kurowski, *Operation "Zitadelle": July 1943, The Decisive Battle of World War II*. (Translated by Fred Steinhardt. Winnipeg, Manitoba: J. J. Fedorowicz Publishing, Inc., 2003), 5.

<sup>30</sup> Dunn, xiii-xiv.

<sup>31</sup> David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *The Battle of Kursk*. (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 21.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Healy, *Kursk 1943: The Tide Turns in the East*, ed. Lee Johnson. Campaign Series in Strategies: Tactics and Battle Experiences of Opposing Armies. (Oxford, UK. Osprey Publishing, 2003), 9.

<sup>33</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Newton, 8-18.

<sup>35</sup> Guderian, 306.

<sup>36</sup> Dunn. xi.

<sup>37</sup> Newton, 9.

<sup>38</sup> Dunn, xiii.

<sup>39</sup> Niklas Zetterling and Anders Frankson, *Kursk 1943: A Statistical Analysis*, (ed. David M. Glantz. Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 8-9.

<sup>40</sup> Guderian, 306

<sup>41</sup> Kurowski, 3.

<sup>42</sup> IBID., 4.

<sup>43</sup> Healy, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Kurowski, 5.

- <sup>45</sup> IBID., 15-22.
- <sup>46</sup> IBID., 19-20.
- <sup>47</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 160.
- <sup>48</sup> Dunn, xiv-xv.
- <sup>49</sup> IBID., 12.
- <sup>50</sup> Guderian, 17.
- <sup>51</sup> Healy, 10.
- <sup>52</sup> Dunn, 99.
- <sup>53</sup> IBID., 100.
- <sup>54</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 164.
- <sup>55</sup> Dunn, 101.
- <sup>56</sup> IBID., 105.
- <sup>57</sup> Dunn, xv.
- <sup>58</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 322-330.
- <sup>59</sup> Kurowski, 30.
- <sup>60</sup> Dunn, xv.
- <sup>61</sup> Kurowski, 40.
- <sup>62</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 74.
- <sup>63</sup> David M. Glantz. *Soviet Military Deception in the Second World War*. (Totowa, NJ: Frank Cass, 1989), 149-150.
- <sup>64</sup> \*David M. Glantz *Soviet Operational Intelligence in the Kursk Operation*. (Paper delivered at the 30<sup>th</sup> International Symposium for Military History. Nurnberg, FRG 3-7 October, 1988), 63.
- <sup>65</sup> IBID., 6-51
- <sup>66</sup> David M. Glantz *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II*, 103-111.
- <sup>67</sup> Kurowski, 30.



<sup>68</sup> Kilzer, Louis. *Hitler's Traitor: Martin Bormann and the Defeat of the Reich* . (Novato, CA:Presidio Press Inc., 2000), 3-14.

<sup>69</sup> Kilzer, 199.

<sup>70</sup> Kurowski, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Healy, 10.

<sup>72</sup> Kilzer, 195-197.

<sup>73</sup> Healy, 10.

<sup>74</sup> Hinsley, F. H., Thomas, E.E., Ransom, C. F. G., Knight, R.C. *British Intelligence in the Second World War: It's Influence on Strategy and Operations, Volume Two* . (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 624.

<sup>75</sup> David M. Glantz. *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II*, 105.

<sup>76</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk* , 79-81.

<sup>77</sup> Dunn, 2-9.

<sup>78</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk* , 79-81.

<sup>79</sup> Zetterling Frankson, 18-20.

<sup>80</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*.

<sup>81</sup> Zetterling and Frankson.

<sup>82</sup> Healy.

<sup>83</sup> Kurowski.

<sup>84</sup> Dunn, 108.

<sup>85</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk* , 86-89.

<sup>86</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 32-33.

<sup>87</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk* , 91.

<sup>88</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 84-98.

<sup>89</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk* , 89.

<sup>90</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 84-98.

<sup>91</sup> IBID., 81.

<sup>92</sup> IBID., 84-85.

<sup>93</sup> Steven H. Newton ed., *Kursk: The German View. Eyewitness Reports of Operation Citadel by the German Commanders*, (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), 77.

<sup>94</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 160.

<sup>95</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 85.

<sup>96</sup> IBID., 84-98.

<sup>97</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 180-196.

<sup>98</sup> IBID.

<sup>99</sup> IBID., 218.

<sup>100</sup> Newton, 88.

<sup>101</sup> Manstein, 449.

<sup>102</sup> Kurowski, 15-22.

<sup>103</sup> Manstein, 437-447.

<sup>104</sup> Kurowski, 19-20.

<sup>105</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 160.

<sup>106</sup> Dunn, 28.

<sup>107</sup> IBID., 142.

<sup>108</sup> David M. Glantz, *Soviet Operational Intelligence in the Kursk Operation*. (Paper delivered at the 30<sup>th</sup> International Symposium for Military History. Nurnberg, FRG 3-7 October, 1988), 63.

<sup>109</sup> IBID., 6-51

<sup>110</sup> Newton, 28.

<sup>111</sup> Glantz and House, *The Battle of Kursk*, 196.

<sup>112</sup> Newton, 25.

<sup>113</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 10.

- <sup>114</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 99.
- <sup>115</sup> IBID.
- <sup>116</sup> Clark, 207-210.
- <sup>117</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 110.
- <sup>118</sup> IBID.
- <sup>119</sup> Clark, 209-210.
- <sup>120</sup> Healy, 9.
- <sup>121</sup> Clark, 209.
- <sup>122</sup> Beevor, 69-81.
- <sup>123</sup> IBID., 124.
- <sup>124</sup> Dunn, x.
- <sup>125</sup> Manstein, 290.
- <sup>126</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 4.
- <sup>127</sup> Manstein, 412.
- <sup>128</sup> IBID., 446.
- <sup>129</sup> Newton, 25.
- <sup>130</sup> Healy, 74.
- <sup>131</sup> Newton, 24.
- <sup>132</sup> IBID., 48.
- <sup>133</sup> Guderian, 312.
- <sup>134</sup> Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler*, 124.
- <sup>135</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 6-8.
- <sup>136</sup> IBID.
- <sup>137</sup> IBID.
- <sup>138</sup> David M. Glantz *The Role of Intelligence in Soviet Military Strategy in World War II*, 222.

<sup>139</sup> Kilzer, 111.

<sup>140</sup> Manstein, 443.

<sup>141</sup> IBID.

<sup>142</sup> IBID.

<sup>143</sup> Guide to Foreign Military Studies 1945-54, *Delaying Actions*. Blumentritt, Guenther. (MS# B-704, Historical Division, Headquarters U.S. Army Europe, Foreign Military Studies Branch. Neustadt, Germany, November 1947), 1-4.

<sup>144</sup> IBID., 4-5.

<sup>145</sup> Guide to Foreign Military Studies 1945-54, *The Construction of a Strategic Defense Line in the East*. Author Unknown. (MS# D-156, Historical Division, Headquarters U.S. Army Europe, Foreign Military Studies Branch. Garmisch, 28 May, 1947), 2-12.

<sup>146</sup> Manstein, 443.

<sup>147</sup> IBID., 445.

<sup>148</sup> Zetterling and Frankson, 6-8.

<sup>149</sup> Manstein, 278

<sup>150</sup> Dunn, 37.



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